

APPENDIX

13. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 26, wherein the first transmission media includes a plurality of telephony devices coupled to the set-top boxes.
14. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 13, wherein one or more of the telephony devices of the first transmission media comprises a telephone coupled to a set-top box of the plurality of set-top boxes.
15. (Original) The method of claim 13, wherein a first telephony device of the plurality of telephony devices coupled to a first set-top box is able to communicate with the plurality of telephony devices coupled to the plurality of set-top boxes using a Public Switched Telephone Network contained within the first transmission media.
16. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 15, wherein the first telephony device comprises a telephone.
17. (Original) The method of claim 13, wherein a first telephony device coupled to a first set-top box is operable to communicate with the plurality of telephony devices coupled to the plurality of set-top boxes using the Internet.
18. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 26 ~~claim 12~~, wherein the second transmission media comprises the first transmission media.
19. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 26 ~~claim 12~~, wherein the third transmission media comprises the second transmission media.
20. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 26 ~~claim 12~~, wherein the second and the third transmission medium comprise the first transmission media.
21. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 26 ~~claim 12~~, wherein the second, third, and fourth transmission medium comprise the first transmission media.

31. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 26 ~~claim 12~~, wherein the data transmitted after establishing the data link includes a plurality of voice packets, thereby bypassing a public switched telephone network.

32. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 26 ~~claim 12~~, wherein the data transmitted after the establishment of the data link over the data link includes one or more of Internet Protocol addresses, Media Access Control (MAC) addresses, e-mail addresses, mailing addresses, television viewing preferences, television viewing history, photographic archives, personal or family activity schedules, address books, websites, audio files, video files, and travel itineraries.

33. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 26 ~~claim 12~~, wherein each set-top box of the plurality of set-top boxes transmits notification of a change in its data link availability to the plurality of set-top boxes to enable the plurality of set-top boxes to access the data link between said plurality of set-top boxes.

34.-37. (Cancelled)

38. (Currently Amended) The ~~method system~~ of claim 26 ~~claim 34~~, wherein ~~the plurality of transmission paths~~ at least one of the first, second, third and fourth transmission media includes one or more of an Internet, a Public Switched Telephone Network, a microwave communication system, an optical communication system, a cable communication system, and a radiofrequency communication system.

39. (Currently Amended) The ~~structure~~ method of claim 26 ~~claim 35~~, wherein ~~a transmission path of the plurality of transmission paths~~ at least one of the first, second, third and fourth media includes a first cable headend coupled to a first input/output terminal of the first set-top box, and a second cable headend coupled to a plurality of input/output terminals of the plurality of set-top boxes.

maintaining current identification information between the plurality of set-top boxes to allow the data link to be continuously accessible by the plurality of set-top boxes,

wherein at least one of the plurality of set-top boxes contains a transmit/receive device for the transmission and reception of the plurality of data packets and wherein establishing contact between the users of a plurality of set-top boxes through a first transmission media comprises establishing a communication link between a first transmit/receive device of a first ~~of first~~ set-top box and a second transmit-receive device of a second set-top box, further comprising:

the first transmit/receive device switching into an analog circuit of the first telephony device and sending a synchronization sequence for receipt by the second transmit/receive device of the second telephony device; and

the second telephony device detecting the synchronization sequence, muting a handset of the second telephony device, and coupling a plurality of telephone signals of the second telephony device to the second transmit/receive device of the second telephony device.

27. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 26 ~~claim 12~~, wherein the data transfer initiated by a first user of the users of the plurality of set-top boxes occupies the first transmission media used to establish contact between the plurality of users, thereby temporarily halting a voice communication between the first user and the plurality of users.

28. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 26 ~~claim 12~~, wherein an amount and a type of identification information exchanged varies depending upon a security policy defined for the users of the plurality of set-top boxes.

29. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 26 ~~claim 12~~, wherein the identification information exchanged includes acknowledgment information.

30. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 26 ~~claim 12~~, wherein establishing the data link includes exchanging acknowledgment information between the plurality of set-top boxes.

22. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 26 ~~claim 12~~, wherein the second transmission media comprises the Internet.

23. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 26 ~~claim 12~~, wherein the second transmission media comprises a Public Switched Telephone Network.

24. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 13, wherein the plurality of telephony devices comprises a plurality of telephones.

25. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 26 ~~claim 12~~, wherein at least one of the plurality of set-top boxes contains a transmit/receive device for the transmission and reception of the plurality of data packets.

26. (Currently Amended) A method for establishing a data link between users of set-top boxes and sharing data through the data link, comprising:

establishing contact between the users of a plurality of set-top boxes through a first transmission media;

initiating a data transfer between the plurality of set-top boxes using a second transmission media;

exchanging identification information between the plurality of set-top boxes using a third transmission media;

using the identification information to establish a data link between the plurality of set-top boxes using a fourth transmission media;

exchanging a plurality of data packets between the plurality of set-top boxes over the data link; and

40. (Original) The structure of claim 39, wherein the first and second cable headends are the same.

41. (Currently Amended) The structure of claim 39, wherein ~~a transmission path of the plurality of transmission paths~~ at least one of the first, second, third and fourth transmission media includes an Internet coupled to a first input/output terminal of the first cable headend and coupled to a first input/output terminal of the second cable headend.

42. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 39, wherein ~~a transmission path of the plurality of transmission paths~~ at least one of the first, second, third and fourth transmission media includes a public switched telephone system coupled to a first input/output terminal of the first cable headend and coupled to a first input/output terminal of the second cable headend.